

***Tolerance: The Glue that Binds Us: Empathy, Fairness and Reason***

**Rivka T. Witenberg**

Nova Science Publishers (2016).

ISBN: 9781634842587 (hardcover)

ISBN: 9781634842594 (eBook)

Hardcover - 151pp- \$144

**Reviewed by Manuela Thomae**

Senior Lecturer in Psychology

University of Winchester

[manuela.thomae@winchester.ac.uk](mailto:manuela.thomae@winchester.ac.uk)

Several political events of 2016 left our discipline confused and baffled. Consequently, Rivka T. Witenberg's book "Tolerance: The Glue that Binds Us: Empathy, Fairness and Reason" is a timely publication, reminding us of the importance of the fundamental value of tolerance. Witenberg aims to conceptualise and define tolerance as a psychological construct. She gives an overview of the existing academic literature and provides suggestions on how to protect and advance tolerance through interventions. To do so, Witenberg presents a broad philosophical, political, religious, educational and psychological overview of tolerance. 'Tolerance: The glue that binds us' strongly reflects Witenberg's own cognitive developmental expertise, whilst simultaneously adopting an interdisciplinary and applied angle. Based on her specialist knowledge, Witenberg presents one of very few existing works on tolerance as an independent psychological construct.

'Tolerance: The Glue that Binds Us' targets an academic audience but can be read and understood by interested students as well as laypeople. However, the main obstacle to accessing this book is its prohibitively high price. With only 151 pages, 'Tolerance: The Glue that Binds Us' carries the (un)impressive price tag of \$144, making the book inaccessible for individuals who do not have substantial funds or libraries listing this publication.

Witenberg defines tolerance as a moral value, distinct from prejudice and discrimination, and introduces the construct of 'tolerance towards human diversity'. Witenberg also acknowledges the highly ambiguous nature of tolerance: 'Tolerating' somebody or something

This is an accepted manuscript of an article published by British Psychological Society in Social Psychological Review, available online at <https://shop.bps.org.uk/publications/publication-by-series/social-psychological-review.html>. It is not the copy of record. Copyright © 2018, British Psychological Society.

tends to be understood as reluctantly ‘putting up’ with people or facts of life that cannot be avoided. Witenberg further dedicates substantial reflections to the necessity of limiting tolerance (i.e. the need to be intolerant of intolerance). However, she does not integrate much social psychological research into this discussion. For example, Allport (1954) makes a strong case for different forms of tolerance (Chapter 27: ‘The Tolerant Personality’). Since these older ideas on tolerance substantially converge with the ideas presented in the book, Witenberg’s omission to link her work with Allport’s work leaves room for future empirical and theoretical integration.

‘Tolerance: The Glue that Binds Us’ discusses the ‘Golden Rule’ of reciprocity, empathy, perspective taking and altruism. The ‘Golden Rule’ refers to the ancient and near-universal ideal of treating others the way we wish to be treated ourselves. Witenberg also discusses freedom of speech on numerous occasions and dedicates a full chapter to the complicated relationship between freedom of speech and tolerance. She argues that principles of freedom of speech often override tolerant values, creating a blurred line between freedom of expression on the one hand and the right to freedom from harm and discrimination on the other. By doing so, Witenberg links her discussion of the psychology of tolerance to very broad ideological, philosophical and political debates.

The final chapter summarises approaches and materials available to instil tolerant values. Witenberg discusses policy documents outlining abstract and general principles guiding human interactions such as the UNESCO ‘Declaration of Principles of Tolerance’ or the OSCE ‘Charter of Tolerance’. She also discusses specific tolerance interventions targeting schools. These interventions include teacher and pupil training programmes provided by initiatives such as the Anti-Defamation League (US based) or the ‘Together in Harmony’ programme (Australia; among other efforts worldwide). Moreover, Witenberg signposts a number of internet resources promoting tolerance. Although she does not propose any specific new interventions, the information provided gives the reader pointers for follow up of existing programmes.

Most of the concrete interventions outlined by Witenberg target school-aged children and require age-appropriate materials. Witenberg stresses children’s early and natural understanding of fairness and justice as a starting point for such interventions. She also emphasises that existing school curricula can serve as a springboard for conversations about

This is an accepted manuscript of an article published by British Psychological Society in *Social Psychological Review*, available online at <https://shop.bps.org.uk/publications/publication-by-series/social-psychological-review.html>. It is not the copy of record. Copyright © 2018, British Psychological Society.

tolerance. On several occasions Witenberg reports her own research with children and young people to support her ideas, building on Kohlberg's theory of moral development and Schwartz's value theory. Her largely child-focussed approach to the psychological aspects of this book allows for future extensions of tolerance research to adult samples.

On the psychological level, Witenberg suggests fostering personality traits such as agreeableness and openness through classroom discussions by, for example, utilising opportunities provided by existing classroom materials such as Harper Lee's 'To kill a mockingbird'. Yet, Witenberg omits discussing the existing social psychological literature on the effectiveness of such interventions targeting children. This allows for future cross-fertilisation between Witenberg's work and existing empirical findings such as the impact of the Harry Potter book series on children's attitudes towards stigmatised groups (Vezzali, Stathi, Giovannini, Capozza & Trifiletti, 2015), the potential of videogames for reducing intergroup bias (Adachi, Hodson, Willoughby & Zanette, 2014) and wider, non-media based efforts encouraging peaceful coexistence (c.f., McKeown & Cairns, 2012).

Witenberg acknowledges that intergroup relations can be improved through empathy building but hardly covers social psychological research on the topic. She argues that interventions to reduce prejudice have produced mixed results and that tolerance promotion may be a viable alternative approach. Given that she does not discuss any evidence on the effectiveness of tolerance promotion programmes, this suggestion is ambitious. Social psychology has accumulated an extensive body of research on different approaches to reduce prejudice and discrimination, spanning several decades (e.g., Allport, 1954; Brewer, 1999; Gaertner, Dovidio, Anastasio, Bachman & Rust, 1993, Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). Yet, Witenberg mentions the intergroup contact hypothesis only once, in the last paragraph of the final chapter, while none of the other social psychological approaches to improve intergroup relations are discussed in the book. A further gap in 'Tolerance: The Glue that Binds Us' is the lack of the literature on group processes and intergroup relations explaining the psychological mechanisms behind intergroup hostilities. Taken together, these gaps leave exciting opportunities to expand the ongoing social psychological work to incorporate tolerance.

'Tolerance: The Glue that Binds Us' opens up new possibilities to integrate existing social psychological work with Witenberg's positively connotated construct of tolerance. This is an accepted manuscript of an article published by British Psychological Society in *Social Psychological Review*, available online at <https://shop.bps.org.uk/publications/publication-by-series/social-psychological-review.html>. It is not the copy of record. Copyright © 2018, British Psychological Society.

Before taking first steps towards sub-disciplinary integration however, social psychologists need to agree whether tolerance indeed is a construct that is related to but different from the absence of prejudice and, if so, how to define and operationalise it. It will further be illuminating to combine existing social psychological theory and research with the interdisciplinary work on tolerance. For example, it would be interesting to see to what degree mechanisms driving prejudice, discrimination and other forms of intergroup animosity can be linked to tolerant values and behaviour. On a basic methodological level, Witenberg's work with children and adolescents can be extended to adult samples. Many aspects of Witenberg's work converge with current social psychological thinking despite adopting different theoretical and methodological approaches. However, the two literatures have not yet been integrated and working towards such an integration will be truly enriching for tolerance as well as prejudice research.

'Tolerance: The Glue that Binds Us' is an important first step in the discussion of tolerance as an independent and qualitatively different construct from the absence of prejudice. Witenberg provides an overview of her own cognitive developmental research as well as more abstract philosophical and religious ideas relating to tolerance. She discusses local school-based interventions alongside large-scale international efforts to promote tolerance. As such, Witenberg addresses the developing individual as well as international political and policy efforts. Future social psychological research can sit at a comfortable in-between level, investigating tolerance, its drivers and its outcomes in intergroup encounters.

## References

- Adachi, P. J., Hodson, G., Willoughby, T., & Zanette, S. (2014). Brothers and sisters in arms: Intergroup cooperation in a violent shooter game can reduce intergroup bias. *Psychology of Violence*, 5(4), 455-462.
- Allport, G.W. (1954). *The nature of prejudice*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday.
- Brewer, M. B. (1999). The psychology of prejudice: Ingroup love and outgroup hate?. *Journal of Social Issues*, 55(3), 429-444.

- Gaertner, S. L., Dovidio, J. F., Anastasio, P. A., Bachman, B. A., & Rust, M. C. (1993). The common ingroup identity model: Recategorization and the reduction of intergroup bias. *European Review of Social Psychology*, 4(1), 1-26.
- McKeown, S., & Cairns, E. (2012). Peacemaking youth programmes in Northern Ireland. *Journal of Aggression, Conflict and Peace Research*, 4(2), 69-75.
- Pettigrew, T. F., & Tropp, L. R. (2006). A meta-analytic test of intergroup contact theory. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 90(5), 751-783.
- Vezzali, L., Stathi, S., Giovannini, D., Capozza, D., & Trifiletti, E. (2015). The greatest magic of Harry Potter: Reducing prejudice. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 45(2), 105-121.